

Washington, DC — Today Congressman Joe Sestak (D-PA) released the following statement about his vote in support of the Responsible Redeployment from Iraq Act} — “I am disappointed with this bill, which is why, although I ultimately voted for it, I also previously voted earlier in the day to send the bill back to committee in an effort to strengthen and improve it, which failed.

This bill does no harm, it also does little good. While its goal is to reduce the number of US troops in Iraq, it leaves a “limited presence” in Iraq by its deadline of April 1, 2008 – a level of troops and their missions to be determined by President Bush. Because it does not set specific enough goals for the redeployment or sufficient time and leaves too much discretion with the President, too many details are left unaddressed. It is a small step in the right direction, but we need to do much more than this bill does... which is too little.

We need a strategic approach to ending this war because the consequences of failure are immense. Congress is close, as it should be, to ending this tragic misadventure but we need to set a date certain for a safe redeployment. Ending this war is necessary, but insufficient. How we end it, and by what means, are more important for our troops’ safety and our own security. It takes a strategic approach that defines the “end” of the commitment which President Bush once said would not be open-ended. The Congress must define why and how such an approach is in our best interests, including for a stable aftermath in Iraq. It can be done by a timely date-certain; we must define it to the public and the world for it is our responsibility to do so when the consequences are so great for our nation.

Even for those convinced that the surge in Iraq is a mistake – or we have reached the point where our goals cannot realistically be attained – the manner in which we manage the transition from a major war to its aftermath is crucial for our national security. And therefore Congress owes the public a careful explanation why and how it will be done. Americans may be tired of this war, but they still expect us to salvage as much as possible from the situation and protect our broader interests in the region and the world.

This is not about just “getting the troops home.” Rather, the important concept to pursue is a strategic redeployment from Iraq that enhances our security by giving us the leverage to begin to unify Iraqis. However many Americans want to reduce U.S. forces in Iraq now, we must still face what will happen there once we leave. And while some may try to characterize this as President Bush’s war, it is our nation’s war in terms of how the consequences will affect us. A careless redeployment endangers our 160,000 troops and over 160,000 civilian contractors in Iraq. The withdrawal process is when military forces are at their most vulnerable – it took six

months to redeploy our 6,000 troops safely from Somalia in the mid 90s and we inserted 17,000 troops for their withdrawal and protection.

And some ideas for a drawdown will prove less viable than may be apparent. For instance, maintaining residual forces to train Iraqis may not work for the safety of US. troops embedded in an Iraqi military whose loyalty is suspect at best, and fighting motivation questionable. Would we then need to retain large combat forces, for their protection, and how many? Let's therefore understand the full limitations of such ideas before supporting them without careful strategic thought.

Such strategic considerations suggest that the precise shape of a strategy to redeploy matters a great deal. Responsibility should be assigned; to the Iraqis to assume accountability for their country; to regional nations to demonstrate accommodations toward stability; and to Congress for the consequences of the aftermath, which it will have directed.

A realistic timeline of a year is needed for a safe redeployment of our troops also serves well to protect our regional interests. It provides the time for a regional accommodation to take effect with Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia, a strategy that rightly relies upon their long-term interests in a stable aftermath.

Most importantly, we must make it clear that we will not be held hostage to the permission of our Iraqi friends. This is the crux of the strategic approach to enhancing our global strategic security: While Iraqis will have ultimate say over their country; we need to send a strong message that we are no longer willing to support it in a futile pursuit. Only by a date that defines the end of our open-ended commitment can we force the Iraqis and regional nations to assume responsibility in working toward a stable Iraq.

I voted for this bill, but I did so reluctantly for it does little to define the how and why within a strategic approach to redeploy from Iraq with a date certain and leave behind the possibility of an un-failed Iraqi state. We owe such a comprehensive explanation to the country and the world for it is our responsibility to do so when the consequences are so great for our nation and Congress is the one to soon enforce an end to it by its own force of law.

Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security

Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.